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Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2006

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Mr. Diego **Simancas** (Mexico)

II. Calendar of conferences and meetings

C. Improved utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

2. Meeting statistics of United Nations organs and consultations with bodies concerning utilization of the conference services available to them

Introduction and overview

1. At its 475th and 476th meetings, on 11 September 2006, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences containing statistical data and analysis of the planned and actual utilization of conference resources allocated to a core sample of bodies that met in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi in 2005 (A/61/129, paras. 14-23 and annex I). The overall utilization factor at the four duty stations had increased from 83 per cent in 2004 to 85 per cent in 2005, owing to improved utilization in New York, which had surpassed the 80 per cent benchmark for the first time. That improvement more than offset the slight dip at the other duty stations.

2. The Committee also heard an oral report by the Chairman of the Committee on her consultations with the eight intergovernmental bodies which had utilized less than the applicable benchmark percentage of their allocated resources for the past three years. Three of those bodies had reached or surpassed the 80 per cent benchmark in 2006, an achievement that many of her interlocutors had attributed to perseverance in consultations and other efforts to improve utilization. The aim of her consultations had been to strike a reasonable balance between efficient substantive work and rational use of conference resources by identifying, on a case-by-case basis, the major factors affecting low utilization and finding efficient ways and means to improve the situation. The meetings had been conducted in a spirit of

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cooperation and constructive dialogue, without losing sight of the specificity of the bodies concerned. The working methods of the bodies varied significantly, so that no one remedy could be applied to all. She had concluded that some of the bodies underutilizing their conference resources could use fewer meetings with interpretation to complete their work, and, indeed, some had done so or expressed the intention to do so. She had also encouraged the adoption of such time-honoured methods as improving the accuracy of advance planning in terms of the number of meetings with interpretation; opening meetings on time, waiving the quorum rule; proceeding to discussion of other items or informal consultations; avoiding last-minute cancellations of meetings; and making full use of the opportunity to hold informal consultations or allocate services to meetings of regional groups.

3. On the basis of her experience, she suggested a three-pronged approach. The Committee on Conferences and its Chairperson, acting on its behalf, should conduct consultations with chairpersons, particularly incoming chairpersons, and inform them of the relevant guidelines and recommendations for the utilization of conference services; the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management should continue its proactive approach with "underutilizers" at the planning stage; and the intergovernmental bodies should improve their planning and organization of work by being more realistic in their requests for conference services.

4. The Committee welcomed the increase in overall utilization. The view was expressed that consultations between the Chairperson and underutilizers was one of the most valuable tools that the Committee had at its command. It was stressed that the contact should be not only with the secretariat of the body in question but with its chairperson and bureau as well, in order to avoid misunderstandings. While it was worthwhile to ensure the best use of conference-servicing resources, the needs of the intergovernmental bodies should not be lost sight of. Many reasons for a loss of available conference services were beyond the control of the bodies concerned. Some members found it paradoxical that, while New York offered greater opportunities to reassign released resources, New York had the lowest utilization factor of all the duty stations.

5. In response to requests for clarification, a representative of the Secretariat briefly reviewed the methodology for calculating the indicators used, which had been approved by the Committee in previous years: the meeting ratio, the planning accuracy factor and the utilization factor. The value of the utilization factor as a tool was enhanced because it was calculated the same way at all four duty stations and had been the first such indicator to be automated. Since there was a greater likelihood in New York that cancelled meeting time could be reassigned to an unrelated body, for the sake of better comparison a column had been added that showed the utilization factor that would result if only reassignments to related bodies were credited. The core sample of bodies shown in A/61/129, annex I, included all bodies that had repeated sessions and excluded most ad hoc committees and expert groups. Despite all the possible extraneous factors, if an intergovernmental body consistently showed low indicators year after year, there was a good chance that with consultation it could improve its use of resources.

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